3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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CHAPTER XIV

The Supreme Being

776 OF the Supreme Being there is little that can be said with certainty beyond that He was believed in prior to the coming of the white man and the teachings of Christianity. The existence of this belief cannot be doubted. Indications of it are found everywhere in the native mind inextricably intertwined with life and thought and language, with prayer and sacrifice, with birth and death, with famine and pestilence and sword. For the rest, there is much confusion. That a developed [779] theology does not exist, hardly needs to be said. What one informant will give as common belief, another will say he never heard of; it belongs, he will tell you, to another district, but it was not the belief of his fathers.

776 538 Many parables and proverbs, of the pre-European origin of which there can be no doubt, give evidence of the belief in a Supreme Being. "Who mocks at orphans," says an old proverb, "let him beware: God is watching him." "God will judge between us and the white man," a common saying at funerals, is necessarily of recent origin; but there are scores of other sayings which are certainly ancient. Many

3: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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of these are expressed in archaic language, which is not in use at all to-day, except in these and similar sayings. Thus we have, "*Chilulu ku ni*," the Great One is everywhere; "*Gwende owuno*," go where you will (you will hear of God). "*Imbwa yikuwa pa lwigi*," literally means, the dog is fighting at the door, but the actual meaning is, God is within you. Expressions like these are very numerous, and, even in their archaic form, are in common use every day.

The names in use for the Deity give some indication of how He is regarded. The name most commonly used in Konde is *Kyala*, but although it is now almost exclusively used in public worship, in the translation of the Scriptures, and in hymns, it is, perhaps, the weakest of all the Divine names. For it may be applied to persons in whom the Deity dwells, or to men who, though they lived on earth, were yet *Kyala*. The name is sometimes applied to white men, who are dangerous because they are believed to have closer relations with the source of all power than common men have. Other names are *Tenende*, the Owner of all things; *Nkurumuke*, the Undying One; *Chata*, the Originator; *Kyaubiri*, the Unseen; *Kalesi*, He who is everywhere present. The name *Ndorombwike* is the one used on solemn occasions, and comes from the verb *kuturomboka*, to create in a sense in which God only can. *Mperi*, again, is the Maker, applied to God only, though the verb from which it is derived may be applied to men also.

Prayer is addressed directly to the ancestral spirits, who in many cases are conceived as having power of

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themselves to grant a petition; but more frequently they are entreated to carry the petitions to God, who alone can give what is asked for. "Why do you ask me for rain?" says Chungu, when his impatient people come to him, "God owns the rain, and only He can give it." "But," reply the people, "common men cannot pray. Pray you to your ancestors, and let them carry your prayer to God." There is, however, also direct address in the formula, "Be gracious to us, O God, and hear the prayers of those whom we have named," the reference being to the spirits, to whom the main body of the petition is addressed. At birth, prayer is offered for the welfare of the child, "May God be gracious to you, my son." The dead are with God, and the spirits who were in the underworld before the entrance there of the souls of men, see His face, "for these are they who see God." Sickness also may be a divine infliction, though it may also be due to the wrath of an offended spirit. A heathen chief who came to see me during an illness, said, "You will recover if it is God's will," words which might well be a mere echo of what he had heard from Christian teachers; but the impression they made on me was that he was expressing a pious thought from the depths of his own being.

When I was told that Chungu had once crossed the lake on dry land, and asked how that could be, the answer, quietly and seriously given, was that "Chungu is the man who speaks with God"; why therefore should the statement be doubted? God gives to prophets their dream-visions, and to others their

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inspired moments. He is the Maker of sorcerers as well as of common people. "Why do you kill me?" demanded an agonized sorcerer from within the house where they were burning him to death. "Did God not make me as well as you?" "Yes," was the grim reply, "but He also made the grass we burn in November."

The Supreme Being reveals Himself "in divers manners." What is specially great of its kind; a great ox, or even a he-goat; a very big tree, or any other specially impressive object, is called *Kyala*, by which is probably meant that God takes up a temporary abode in them. In a great storm God is walking on the lake. A waterfall, when it is unusually noisy, is His voice. In 1921 God called from a waterfall in the Nenya district during the night, and the message, interpreted by the *abalowosa malaya* (inspired persons), was that all must die because of the evil that was rampant in the district. The earthquake is His mighty footstep, and the lightning is *Lesa*, God coming down in anger, when all rational people sit silent or speak in whispers, lest "the anger," hearing them, should smite them down. He sometimes comes in the body of a lion or a snake, and in such a form "He walks among men to see their doings."

He is a God of righteousness, though the Konde idea of righteousness does not always coincide with ours. Unrighteousness is an offence against God, even though they do not always know why, and He never comes except when evil is prevalent, and punishment is needed, a point of view from which it is easy to

2: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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• 176 understand that the chief desire of the people is to induce Him to go away again. "Go far hence, O God, to the forest, for Thy House is very large," is a prayer which is not seldom heard, when it is believed [324] that He is near. An eclipse is a special visitation, and is met with wild drumming and shouting, confession of sins, and extortion, for the consciousness of sin is by no means absent from their minds. Offerings are brought to the spirits to induce them to intercede, but no offerings are made to *Ndzwabwidze* Himself, for nothing can be offered that has any value for Him. "God is calling in the waterfall," "God has kindled a fire in the pool," are cries of dread alarm to this day, only in a small degree comparable to the fear that is inspired when it is declared that a spirit, of however great a man, is angry. God is an ever present terror, and the idea of communion with Him for any purpose, is one that has not entered the Kondo mind. He is *Tewendo*, the Owner of the world, and it is for men to see that He is not offended. Of the many sins [325] which bring the wrath of God and the spirits on the community, the most important are widespread sexual sin, and neglect of sacrifices.

And yet God is *Tata Tawa*, the Father of us all, from whom help may be expected when men deserve it. The remarkable incident of the floating of the *Domira*, referred to in Chapter I, bears its own evidence of native thinking about the Deity. "Then I said, Rejoice, for God has heard my prayers." It does not seem open to reasonable doubt that Chungu was casting himself upon unseen powers, making, in

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fact, what Christians call the venture of faith; and his men, believing that he was in touch with God, knew that he could give additional strength to their arms, and they pulled successfully. 776 •

Nevertheless, it is important to guard against exaggerated ideas of the Supreme Being as He is conceived by the Konde. It is not to be supposed that the African idea of Omnipotence has much in common with the Christian and Philosophic ideas on the subject. God is a magnified human being, a being anthropomorphically conceived. Omnipotence is an idea limited by the native capacity to conceive of powers beyond power to do without limit what he himself can do within limits. The vastness of time and space, and the illimitable forces acting throughout the universe, are unrepresented in the native mind, and therefore the conception of a Supreme Being is severely limited. But the point is, that such as He is, He is supreme over men and spirits, and over the forces of Nature as these are understood; and that is sufficient in the minds of the Konde, as it is sufficient in the minds of more highly developed peoples, to place God in a category by Himself, in a position which He shares with no other being.

Do the Konde recognize minor deities? The question is not easy to answer. An old man with whom I was conversing on the subject recently, looked at me with surprise when I brought the conversation round to "other gods." "There is only one *Kyala* (God)," he said with great emphasis, and other old men gave the same decided reply; nor do the younger

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116 men admit that their fathers ever acknowledged more than one God. And yet, as I have already indicated, the name *Kyala* is by no means restricted to the Supreme Being; and there are legends of human gods which go far back into the past. The Henga, a neighbouring tribe, freely acknowledge the worship, in the past, of a number of minor deities, and belief in them is common among the Bantu peoples generally. This is, perhaps, the point at which the confusion in the Konde mind reveals itself most decidedly, for it is the border line between the spirits of great chiefs still active in the underworld, minor deities, and the Supreme Being Himself.

113 In the land of Marungu, from which the Konde originally came, so say the fathers (who in the same breath will deny the existence of more than one God), there were three gods, *Lyambile*, *Mlasi*, and *Ngheta*. Of *Lyambile* all that need be said is that he is still the god of the Kings. *Ngheta* was the youngest of the three, and one day he went with his boy friends to herd the cattle on the plain. While they were there *Ngheta* took maize and planted it, and lo! it grew, and the same day they ate it roasted in the fire. When the elders of the people and the other two gods heard of it, they were jealous and slew *Ngheta*. He lay dead for three days, and on the third day he arose, but was killed again in exceeding great anger. Again he arose, and was seen by some, but disappeared, and it was said that he went to the coast, where he became the God of the white man. The older men say that this story has not been modified by Christian influence

3: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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and it may be so, but there is a variant, which is free 773
from suspicion, in which the God came back to life in the form of a serpent, was cut to pieces by his fellow-gods and the elders, who, when he again came back, served him as before, upon which he went to the white men, who to this day prays to him. At Karonga the old people used to say, "We have smitten the Son of God in the neck," but I have not been able to trace the origin or connection of the saying, except that it is not Christian, and may be connected with traditions of *Ngoleo*.

The story of *Mbasi* is very different. He is the 776 •
evil one, to whom deceit and wickedness are a pleasure. 792
Europeans are still living who have seen the great stores of ivory and cloth which were offered to him by terror-inspired people, and laid up in a cave at Matema on the lake shore. The cave has now been robbed of its contents, as *Mbasi* himself has been of whatever of dread his name inspired in the past. It is not very long ago that the last prophet of *Mbasi* died. He lived near Masoko, and within living memory he climbed a small eminence there, and proclaimed that *Mbasi* demanded cattle to be sent to him without delay, the prophet himself being the guardian appointed by the God. And the cattle were sent in goodly numbers!

Long ago, says a legend, when *Mbasi* walked 773
the earth, he had men who were always with him. 776
Mwasomola went with him to his friend Mwakanyamata. *Mbasi* told them many things, of witchcraft, of hunger, of diseases that were to come, of the

3: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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approach of the Angoni warriors, and where to flee for safety when they arrived. He asked for *Mawg* and a pipe, and these were laid on the ground, and soon smoke was seen issuing from the earth. For *Mbasi* was not seen; they only heard his voice. Then he became communicative. "The Angoni are coming now," he told them, "go at once to Mambo with your wives and children and cattle." The unfortunate Mwakanyamata did as he was advised, only to be robbed of all his cattle by another friend of *Mbasi*, to whom the deceitful God sent word to have no mercy on the cattle of a fool like Mwakanyamata, who believed what he was told! And to this day Mwakanyamata is laughed at as the man who allowed himself to be deceived by the wiles of *Mbasi*.

According to another version, *Mbasi* was a rival claimant to Divine honours with *Ndorombwiko* Himself. Originally he was a serpent, killed in the dim past by the chief Mwakibinga. *Mbasi* returned to earth as a spirit, seeking to persuade men to worship him, offering them wealth in cattle if they agreed. But men refused, "for the dead do not return." One chief, Mwatumba, accepted the false God, but was defeated in battle by Mwakarobo, a final proof that *Mbasi* was a deceiver.

Stories of *Mbasi* and his activities are numerous. He used to do some of his own work; that is to say, instead of sending one of his prophets to demand what he wanted, he shouted from the great *ilinyata* (grave of a chief; place of prayer) at Lubaga in Nsenya, and made his own demands. Milk, beer,

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heavens, were placed at the door of Mwâlindingo his prophet, and if in the morning the quantity was found to be less, it was clear to all that *Mlezi* had come to receive the offerings.

But the trick worked too often. As the fear of *Mlezi* diminished, men began to take advantage of their still credulous neighbours, and to demand in the name of the fading divinity cattle, beer, food supplies, to be sent to the places indicated by the impersonator of the God. This became so common that the Germans, who then ruled the country, interfered and put it down.

Very long ago there lived near Karonga a man called Firegulî, who after his death became a goblet, and lived on the mountain which now goes by his name. There was also a great man called Kambwe, who entered the ranks of the gods or goblets at his death, and lived in the pool a few miles from Karonga, to which in like manner he has given his name. To both of these divinities the people prayed in long-past times; and both, though able to see to the general welfare of the people, were not strong enough to punish them when evil was prevalent. When punishment was necessary, they called in the help of Mwanjebe, a minor deity of the neighbouring Henga people. Firegulî went south on a favouring breeze to invite his more powerful neighbour to come to his help; and Mwanjebe, who lived in a pool at the foot of a waterfall near the Overtoun Institution, came up on a floating island. Then smallpox broke out among the people, and if a visit to Kambwe showed

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that the pool was bubbling, it was evident that Mwanjebe was there, and must be got rid of as soon as possible. Prayers and promises of repentance were offered, and if that did not satisfy the god, more drastic measures were taken. A great stone was heated and tumbled into the pool, around which gathered a great multitude of people, stabbing fiercely at the water with spears and reeds, to drive off the unwelcome deity. The cessation of the bubbling showed that he had gone, and the fact was still further proved when the smallpox ceased. All three godlets are now mere memories, and, except as memories, they have completely vanished, leaving the field clear for the ancestral spirits and the Supreme Being.

There was in the worship, if indeed a determined effort to drive off the deity could be called worship, "no stimulus to the realization of the riches which are given to man in his own nature." The gods presented no problems, for all problems were solved long ago by the fathers; and hence man's relation to them contained nothing upon which the faculties might work and be developed. The religion was stagnant, and the people were stagnant with it.

There was no art; not even rude representations of the gods; no poetry arising out of a feeling of devotion, for devotion there was none. In the case of the godlets I have mentioned, even the qualities which caused them to take rank as gods after death have been forgotten. It may be that the stories of "the brave days of old," to be related in a later chapter, afford us a hint of how the process of deifica-

J. Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
FN17 Ngonde FN17

still sometimes used, is "God will judge between us and the white man," a clear indication that the white man is not received everywhere as an unmixed blessing.

The entrance to the spirit world is the grave; and all that is done there is intended to give the dead man a favourable entrance upon his new state; well dressed, well supplied with all the necessaries of life; for he goes to God. The conditions of life below are the same as those above. The chief is a chief still, and the slave a slave. The rich man continues to be rich, and the poor goes on in his poverty. The wife goes to her husband, children to their parents. There is no retribution, no righting of wrongs. The judgment of God against the white man will be manifested here on earth, not in the future state. The unmarried man remains unmarried, and his body is smeared with charcoal, so that he may not, on arrival, be mistaken for a married man. Cattle are there, but they need no tending; bananas, but they require no cultivation. There is bush for the hunter, and streams for the fisher. But everything is small: cattle, houses, crops, even the spirits themselves, are *ichewe*, thin, unsubstantial.

Prior to the arrival of the first human spirits, the place was inhabited by the owners of the land; and "these are they who see God, for God is a Spirit." Therefore human beings going there are strangers, but are well received, and given all necessaries, including land.

Although the dwelling of the spirits is below, they

3: Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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it is there that prayer for the community at large is offered by the living chief. All over the land there are more or less important graves, where local chiefs pray with their people; but the most important is naturally the one at Mpkande, near Karonga, where Chungu goes to pray. At the house of every head of a family there is the *chipinja*, the sacred banana grove, where the family ceremonies are performed. This grove is never cut down, and the wife must not eat the fruit of it, for the spirit of her father-in-law is there if he is dead; if not, of ancestral fathers-in-law. The decay of the spirit hut, a small erection covering the grave of a chief, is attended with great danger to all the people, for the dead chief will some day visit his resentment upon his unworthy successor, whose duty it is to keep the hut in order; and when the chief suffers, his land suffers with him. A sheep or goat is tied up at the place, and if it is found there in the morning, all is well, it is killed, and the hut is rebuilt. But if it has been killed by some prowling beast of prey, the dead chief is very angry, and the diviner must say what else must be done to appease him, before another animal is found for the sacrifice, and the hut rebuilt.

Here and there are to be found traces of non-human spirits. They are not called *kanyaka*, but *mapiri*, a word which in the neighbouring Henga dialect means hills, but the Konde use it in invocation when crossing water. Their dwelling is in the water; and they are pre-human, spirits that were in the world when the whole earth was covered with

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water. When, later, men came, more favoured of God, the waters retired to the lakes and pools, and there these spirits exist to this day, at enmity with men, whom they seek to destroy. On the lake, during a storm, they are still to be heard, demanding a victim to be thrown to them whom they may "eat." In the past, if a canoe was overtaken by a storm, one of the rowers was thrown into the water, whereupon the storm ceased, and the others arrived in safety.

At many places all over the district there are pools in which these spirits dwell. The most interesting is at Kinyombe, and about it many stories are told, and believed, which throw an interesting light on the Konde mind. When the chief of three generations ago was a very old man, it was prophesied that at his death the lake would recede, the fish would die, bush would grow where water was, and a great disease would carry off many of the people. And it all happened. But the lake, as it receded, left a pool in which some spirits were imprisoned. It is now partly silted up with sand, and treacherous to walk upon. If a man finds himself sinking as he walks over it, he calls out that he belongs to Kinyombe, whereupon he is pushed up from below by the water-spirits, who own Kinyombe's power. A boy who sank right through, but was returned, was directed by the spirits to give a report of all that he saw, and particularly he must insist that these spirits are *abanda* (human beings). If no sacrifice is offered the spirits take their due by snatching at passing children; but it is long since the last child was taken. The pool at Rungwe is

J. Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1923) 1925
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distinguished for the drastic action of the people, who, empowered by the frequent disappearance of children, combined an immense heated stone into the pool, and so drove out the spirits, who to this day dwell in a pool in the Songo country, "where the white men go to see them." 170

Yet another class are the mountain or hill spirits. Offerings are made to them by people climbing steep hill-sides. A stone is picked up, breathed upon, and laid upon a large flat stone, or in the fork of a tree, with the prayer, "May my feet be light." These stones are to be seen to-day in small heaps on many a steep ascent. Sometimes more valuable offerings were made, though these have now ceased. A fowl, a sheep, or a goat, was brought, and left alive to meet whatever fate might be in store for it. These spirits, like those of the water, are pre-human, and hostile to mankind, upon whom they bring many diseases. Belief in them is dying out, and the younger people know little or nothing about them. [53]

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CHAPTER XVI

The Worship of the Spirits

111 THE Konde are either a deeply religious, or a deplorably spirit-ridden people; and, having regard to some of the prayers given in this chapter and throughout the book, I am inclined to think that religious is the more correct term. It is true that the prayers are in all cases for material goods, such as health and good fortune, for rain and crops, for protection against pestilence; but if religion means a sense of dependence upon unseen powers, then it cannot be denied that the Konde are religious.

112 On all great occasions, prayer and offerings are made; 116 but also when a spirit is believed to be angry: if there is quarrelling in the family; if a man beats his wife; if a girl has arrived at puberty, or a marriage has been arranged, without their being consulted; if a woman has been unfaithful to her husband; if a man neglect his parents; if ceremonies are neglected; or the 117 spirits themselves forgotten. Their wrath is shown very specially by an disease of the lips breaking out on the guilty person,, and by fever; but also in many other ways; by the failure of the beer to ferment, by sickness, by a storm in which some one is drowned, by

J. Mackenzie M-S (ca. 1925) 1925
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failure of crops, of increase of livestock, of children, by too little or too much rain, or by ill-success in hunting or fishing; and, very emphatically, by a sudden death. 776

The prayer and ceremony at the presentation of a new-born child have already been given. More pathetic is the prayer offered when a child is ill. Standing at the sacred banana grove, the family representative prays: 782

"... and now this little one whom I hold in my hands, be gracious to him. He [she] has come into a world of sickness, of cold, of all the troubles that you yourselves were familiar with. Let him lie in peace. Let none in the spirit-land be angry with him. To-morrow he will be full-grown, and he will bring you beer, flesh, flour. Pray to God for him. O God, who art Lord of all, let thy breath be cool upon him (lit., Let thy spirits be cool upon him)."

Then, spitting on the child's breast and back, he says:

"And thou child, may there be life in thee. God be gracious unto thee. Live in peace and be not wearied."

Not all diseases are due to the anger of the spirits; a natural illness is one that yields to treatment. It is the act of God, and when the right medicine has been used, cure will follow, for God does not need to be entreated as the spirits do. Yet the spirits carry their petitions to God, as if He did need to be entreated, [753]

6:Wilson E-5 (1936-1938)1939 FN17 Nguruka FN17
Nyakyusa

structure. We shall see in later sections how many details of the secular power of Mbande and of the lesser authorities were dependent upon their religious functions. But the converse is equally true. Among the Nyakyusa, where the hierarchy of chiefs had scarcely any secular content at all, the organization of religious ritual was far less elaborate. Cattle were sent to Lubaga by the other chiefs to be sacrificed for rain and health; but the "clearing out of the ashes" was done by each chiefdom separately; there was no general first-fruit ritual at all;[1] while, as war was never waged on a tribal basis, prayers and sacrifices for military success were always undertaken by each warring chiefdom alone.

Besides the Kyungu the great chiefs of Ngonde also were believed to be able to avert local droughts and misfortunes in their districts by offerings to their own immediate ancestors; and the lesser chiefs likewise and the territorial nobles—each in his own little area. While among the territorial nobles, the original owners of the land had wider powers. It will be remembered that to them the first Kyungu is said to have given head-cloths and asked for their prayers. Sometimes people would prophesy future misfortune "at Kiondelo", or "at Kalumo" or "at Mambo," or would prophesy of present misfortune that such was their source. Then the territorial noble concerned[2] would be formally visited by the nobles of Ngonde, and he and they together would offer sacrifice to his ancestors on behalf of all Ngonde.

And then also there were sacred lagoons near the lake—Nikole, Kambwe, Kibonde, Malale and Katondi. They were associated not with ancestral spirits at all but with a vaguely defined supreme deity named Mbumba. And beside them also prayers and sacrifices were made from time to time by the nobles of Ngonde.

Over these other spiritual powers we need not linger, save to notice one most significant fact. The participation by the Kyungu in the divinity of his ancestors was no isolated phenomenon in Ngonde. The head of every family in the country, whether of chiefs or commoners, was similarly placed; in his own family and, in the case of a chief or noble, in his own area too, he was both a priest and a demi-god; he dealt with the spirits and by virtue of his relation to them shared their powers; his anger could curse. The Kyungu were but the greatest of many divinities. And thus there was in theistic ritual a high degree of local and family autonomy; local or family misfortunes

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[1] Particular people among the Nyakyusa carried it out; reigning chiefs, senior great-councillors, prophets, and any person whose birth was held to be due to magical treatment of a previously barren woman. But only they.

[2] Mwase-kondelo, Mwase-kalumo, Mwase-chambo etc.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

643 778 cattle and protecting one's own, and to attract men to the country.

The two senior sons of a chief are given powdered *ikingila* to 785 drink from early childhood; at the 'coming out' they lie on it and 643 drink it again with their village headmen, some is buried beneath 778 their ritual trees, and the chief's homestead is treated with it periodically. One form of *ikingila* is made of the heart of a lion and the heart of a leopard, together with the scrapings from a charred root, and one of its qualities is to create lions or leopards which guard the trees under which it is buried. 'They make anyone who has cut a branch of one of the trees for firewood tremble at night, he trembles and returns the wood; they do not kill, but they stay roaring there until he repents.' Now part of the dignity (*ubusisya*) of a chief is that lions and leopards attend him; they roam his country; they are his familiars (*imbege*). 'The sons of Lwembe' [776] lack the fearful power of their great ancestor who 'rode a lion like a donkey', but they are believed to command familiars which clear the country of the wild pig that destroy men's gardens, and protect the sacred groves by terrifying any sacrilegious person who dares chop wood where he should fear. But they do not kill men or cattle. That is what distinguishes them from 'God's lions which kill cattle even by day' and the man-eaters made by sorcerers to [754] destroy those they hate. There is no hint of lycanthropy—our informants denied emphatically that chiefs, dead or alive, turned into *imbege*, but they 'follow the chief' when he travels.

A second *ikingila*, sprinkled on the chief's mat when he is secluded, and drunk with his two senior village headmen, is made of red, black, and shining white or yellow pebbles, which are ground up and mixed with *imbinga*, a medicine brought by the Kinga, but the symbolism of these ingredients remains obscure.

The greatest of the *ifingila*, used only for the chief himself, is *inyifwila*, a terrible substance with power perilously like that of witchcraft. When either of the senior wives of a chief gives birth [844] to a son a little is hidden in the litter on which she lies; it is put into the litter on which the heirs lie at the 'coming out'; and into the sacred tails and trumpets which are carried into battle. Like other medicines of chieftainship, *inyifwila* is used to give the chief majesty (*ubusisya*), 'that people who meet him may fear him'; that he and his warriors may appear fierce; that they may be 'heavy and strong' in war; that when the trumpet is blown it

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

. . . I put the stones into water, it is as if someone spilt it out, the sherd dries up. . . . Now Kyala has gone away, the shades have fled, formerly they clapped their hands (indicating satisfaction). . . . There is something about which the shade is angry, because in this homestead we were accustomed to pray frequently. . . . If I boast saying: 'It will rain tomorrow', will it rain?

MWAMAKUNDA THE YOUNGER (gravely, and with hesitation): No, not if Kyala does not wish.

WIFE OF MWAMAKUNDA: But formerly it agreed [i.e. the rain came].

A day or two later Kasitile came in, during the evening, with Mwalusanye, a young doctor, the son of doctors.

K.: This rain, do you not ask about it?

G.W.: Have you been to consult the oracle?

K.: Yes. I consulted it the day before yesterday.

G.W.: What did it say?

K.: It said: 'Your fathers are angry, and Kyala and the Holy Spirit (*NuMbepo Mwikemo*)!'

G.W.: What do they say we have done wrong?

K.: Since Mwaipopo received a Court what have the chiefs given us to say 'We did wrong?' Did they give me a cow? They did not. [Here Kasitile was referring to the insult to Lubaga, *vide supra*, pp. 35-8, and he identifies himself with the priests of Lubaga.] In MuNgonde I was a commoner, I ate meat, here I live hungry.

G.W.: And now who will speak out about this matter?

K.: You, you tell Mwaipopo 'Ask Pikumbaba (Kasitile 86) why this rain does not come, what has happened to it?'

G.W. refused and asked: Who should suggest this according to custom?

K.: Mwamakunda.

MWALUSANYE: Because according to custom, Mwaipaja (G.W.), if things were as they are with us now, if the rain refused, our fathers came to Kasitile (60), the father of this one, to ask him saying, 'Kasitile what has happened to the rain?' But now that our fathers are dead, we are bad, we do not ask.

And a few days later the chief said: We have thrown away our food, it's drying up in the ground . . . this drought! Kasitile says: 'It has defeated me . . . the shades (*imindu*) have caught hold of us.' Perhaps they claim a cow, perhaps it is because Mwaihojo (147) and his fellows paid here. . . . But those beneath are angry (pointing downwards and speaking with conviction), the owner is angry.

The rain-maker therefore is not conceived of as working independently; the goodwill of the shades of the chief is necessary, and perhaps also those of the rain-maker himself, though this is not quite clear. Nowadays, at least, Kyala is also invoked. In

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trouble is that Mwaipopo (the chief 116) is getting old. . . .' Here Kasitile suggested two different causes for the scarcity in the country: (*a*) the negligence of the priests, and (*b*) the senility of the chief. In the old days Mwaipopo would have been smothered, as Angombwike explained (*vide supra*, p. 63).

On the 9th, Kasitile, much troubled by his cough at night, expressed a great desire for the return of the missionary nurse to Kabembe hospital. 'She is killing us by her absence, the black people don't know anything about these things, only the Europeans. Why, I went there and the dresser just gave me an injection without taking my temperature—no European ever does that.'

The following day he sent off his sons with 10 c. to inquire about his case from a diviner. The diviner said: 'The wives at his home are gossiping to other people about their husband. People want the husband's body to be light. It is not Jane, because she is his favourite, but the others.' Kasitile said:

I shan't do anything, I said 'Let's leave it.' I am still in Butola [the village to which he moved for safety]. Mwakyonde is giving me medicine for my disease. It drives out the cold which is in my body. Yes, the cold is the breath of the witches coming to throttle me—it's due to my wives' gossip. But it started as a quarrel with other people [non-relatives] first. One day I went to drink beer in Bujege and that night I fell sick; that is how it began. Men are complaining because I, a chief, a senior, do not cook food for them. They throttle me on that account. They say: 'Let us see whether he is really a chief, a senior!' But others say: 'He has done no wrong.' Yes, the sickness took me on the way home from the beer. Perhaps Kyala asked: 'What has he done?' and found I had done no wrong. If there had not been a Kyala who saves us I would have been dead.

When I consulted a diviner he struck a spear and looked along it, then he said: 'The disease now is from his wives—the earlier attack was from men, but this one is from his wives. When they gather at the hearth they say: "Come hither, we see him where he sleeps." '

'Are the wives witches?' we asked.
Kasitile replied:

Yes. They say: 'There is a favourite, we are not beloved.' If a man's wives are good the witches can get into the house, but their cold breath dissipates quickly; you are given medicine and recover quickly; but if the wives are bad they gather together the medicine and press it down, so that it is powerless. One of my wives is very bad, her lineage is bad, it is she who calls to her aid the heavy ones, the witches. The

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adultery?' Again the ball flattened. 'It denies it.'[1] Then Kasitile, obviously dissatisfied, spoke: 'Nsoki, three cows have slipped their calves at my home, I sent to Ndembwe and he said: "Your fathers are angry, you cut a tree, Mwakisambwe (30) is angry; seek something", so I sought a kid and I recovered. Later I took my bill-hook and cut all round. Now the illness has begun again, and I thought perhaps it was because I did not go to BuKinga to buy a bull, because I sought only a kid?' Nsoki (no longer rolling the porridge): 'Perhaps my oracle is mistaken, it denies it, Kyala above has sent the breath (*imbepo*) to discipline you. I asked the oracle saying, "Perhaps it is the fathers?" but see, it denied it.' Kasitile: 'No, it is not mistaken.' Then he told all over again the story of his pruning the grove and of his illness and of his recovery after killing the kid, concluding 'then I cut again and fell sick.' Nsoki: 'But Kasitile, see! There is much illness about, Kyala has sent it all through the country, to discipline us.'

Shortly afterwards we left. I apologized to Kasitile for spoiling his divination for it was obvious, from his face, that it had gone wrong. He assured me that I had done no wrong but agreed that Nsoki had been afraid of me. . . . 'He feared your body, Mwaipaja [G.W.], you are impressive (*nsiya*), no one builds together with Europeans, he feared to speak. . . . Do you suppose that Kyala alone sent the fever? No! He stands with people, he stands with the shades.' I asked him what he thought. 'Ndembwe's oracle was not mistaken, the shades were indeed angry, but now Nsoki's oracle denies it. It really denied it, I saw the porridge with my own eyes, so I think the illness is from another source now. When he spoke of the "breath of Kyala" he meant "men".' Kasitile lowered his voice as he said this.

QUESTION: But what quarrel have they with you?

KASITILE: None! The oracle denied this. I have done no wrong . . . (later on) He spoke of the fathers, but he was afraid to speak out—they are angry; I should seek something.

QUESTION: To eat with whom?

KASITILE: With the village headman . . . (later on) See Mwaipaja, I cut the grove and at once I fell ill. If you come from doing something and fall ill, do you not begin to wonder? The shades are angry.

He was quite incoherent. First he said the 'breath of men', then the shades, then that the oracle denied the shades—'I saw it do so'—then that it denied witchcraft and that anyway he'd given no occasion for it. The one thing clear was that the divination could not be accepted as it stood. Kyala never acts alone in Nyakyusa thought, and Kasitile's conversation reflected the uncertainty of mind which he had gone to Nsoki to have resolved and which had not been resolved. His opinion

[1] He explained later that 'if the porridge becomes fluid and soft, that means it agrees to what has been said; if it does not change, it denies it'.

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KASITILE: Yes indeed.
SANGU: Now your body is sick, you are coughing.
KASITILE: Yes indeed, I am ill, and I am coughing a great deal.
SANGU: Yes, it is that quarrel down there. You came with the cough from the plain.
KASITILE: Yes, I came with it.
SANGU: You are a priest, you are a senior priest. (He knew this himself!)
KASITILE: Yes indeed.
SANGU: But the cough comes from the quarrel in the plain. If you were not a priest you would have died.
KASITILE: Indeed, we quarrelled over land, over the boundaries, on the plain. I hoed someone else's land—the land of a commoner there.
SANGU: They placed something to injure you.

Kasitile paused in his narrative and we asked how the 'something' operated.

KASITILE: In dreams, by means of their witchcraft.

The Sangu told me: 'It is this which causes you to cough continually, but there is something else also, you did not move to the plain from here without trouble.'

KASITILE: No, I moved with an accusation against me.
SANGU: Yes indeed, you did wrong and now your fathers are very angry.
KASITILE: Yes, I cut a tree.
SANGU: Mother! You cut a tree? The fathers and Kyala are brooding over you, Kyala is angry and broods over you. Pray, pray very much. It is you who are throttling the cattle of the country.

We expressed surprise and Kasitile continued: 'Yes, indeed. The Sangu said: "It is your wrongdoing (in cutting the tree) which is causing the cows to abort. I will clear out the thing which came with you from the plain. Bring 2*s.* tomorrow." He's a great doctor, Mwaipaja.'

The astonishing thing was that Kasitile, a man of considerable intelligence and inclined to query the truth of the revelations of some oracles, was so much impressed by the fact that the foreign doctor (staying in the country) knew that he was a priest and had sojourned in the plain, though to anyone knowing KiNyakyusa well his connexion with the plain was apparent in his speech, and his bearing indicated him as a personage.

Talking of the divination three days later, Kasitile told us the Sangu doctor had said: 'You have done wrong at home. This Kyala (pointing to the little pot into which he was looking) knows that Lwembe and the Kinga and your father are angry, your father is very important, he works with Kyala, he is with him.'

As a treatment for the cough the doctor put various ingredients with

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indeed from the whispering of men and the shades here, but people speak openly, saying: 'Why does he not celebrate the ritual?' The witches do not come into it. 754 775

QUESTION: Well, when the witches do throttle someone, do they always call shades, or not? 753

KASITILE: No, sometimes they throttle a man alone, and the shades are not there.

QUESTION: But your sickness?

KASITILE: Now the priests in their witchcraft gathered with the shades. [793] The day after we had celebrated Njobakosa came to my place and said: 'We have finished then!' I replied: 'Yes, my body is better now, but the cough is separate, it is from Kyala.' And did you not hear what Mwaipopo asked in his cups—'How did the doctor (the Sangu) know that you are a priest? And that you had done wrong? Indeed they (Kissogota and his fellows) had told him!'

QUESTION: What did he mean by that?

KASITILE: That they had gone to the doctor in dreams to tell him. [787]

Asked about Kissogota's words: 'You are impressive, we are cannibals, we are', Kasitile explained: 'It means, "You chiefs kill cattle for us, you are impressive, that is your impressiveness. Do we kill cattle? No! We eat men, we are witches." Because when we have killed cattle they receive blood, their witchcraft goes away, it stays in its house.'

QUESTION: And your reply, 'You are impressive, you are'?

KASITILE: I replied: 'You are impressive, you are, you are witches, if I were alone what would I do? It is you who brought the chilling breath on me and said I had done wrong. Even though I have not done wrong, you wish to eat meat. If I walk about among you, my body shrinks, it fears.'

Mwaipopo (the chief 116) had also prayed with water the night [782] before the sacrifice, he helps me in prayer and if he prays at his house, I help him. We pray with water to bring out everything; if I do not [776] pray with water then something is left within. I summon all the gods, [775] all the fathers, and all the shades. (*Apa tukwiputa namesi ko kusyosya ilisyu loysa, lenga ndikwiputa namesi po lisyele limo nkati. Nikumpala kyala* [539] *gwesa, tata gwesa, abasyuka bosa.*)

QUESTION:

KASITILE: Yes, when Kissogota and his fellows came in their witchcraft [787] to call my shades to their aid, I saw them in dreams, I saw them! And if they correct Mwaipopo like this in witchcraft, together with the shades, he sees them; he complies immediately, he seeks a cow. And if they just come to throttle me I see them. It is the village headmen of the country who come to throttle me, the shades are not there, no, only Kissogota and his fellows, they stand with the shades, not the others they come and suck my blood and they go away again. I do not speak,

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CHAPTER XI

NYAKYUSA COSMOLOGY

772 We can now piece together, from myth and ritual, the traditional Nyakyusa view of their universe. They have no elaborated system of ideas and the synthesis which follows is more systematic than any uneducated Nyakyusa would formulate.

773 The origin of men was a 'dark house', located high on the Livingstone plateau, and from here the Nyakyusa themselves, and people familiar to them, are thought to have sprung, but there is a hint of the first of the heroes having come 'from the north', and there is also the contradictory notion that the heroes were creators. 'It was Kyala who made us in the beginning with iron ore'; 'Kyala [776] is the smith who forges us'; 'Mbasi is the smith who forges us'; 'Lwembe made Mumfu out of clay to be the father of commoners'. But all are agreed that Lwembe (or Mbasi) was the ancestor of the chiefs and no clear distinction is made between creator and progenitor.

Crops and animals and fire were distributed by the heroes. Of their first creation or invention there is no tale for, though Lwembe created animals, he was already a herd-boy when he did so. Moreover, the 'owners of the soil' in the Nyakyusa valley had some crops before Lwembe came bringing them others, together with cattle and fire; but which were the indigenous crops of the valley and which the new is not discussed. If contradictions between the various myths are pointed out they are explained, like divergences in ritual, in terms of differing origin: 'It is the Lambya people to the west who say that cattle came out of an anthill, and the Nyakyusa proper who say they were brought by Lwembe', and so on. Differentiation is epitomized and accounted for by the separation of lineages.

[778] The heroes had a creative force in their own persons, which is inherited by their descendants, the divine kings, and, in a lesser degree, the chiefs; as in Egypt 'the King's potency is felt in the very body and person of each of his subjects'.[1] That potency is partly innate in the royal line, but it is nourished by the use of medicines of which the greatest are reserved to rulers. Vigour is

[1] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, p. 60.

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769 is illustrated in the references made by priests to the python which appears in Lwembe's grove as *kyala* (*vide supra*, pp. 29, 33). This python is 'the lord', Lwembe.

[776] [177] [773] Nowadays Kyala is spoken of as a first cause—the origin of death, and of social institutions, as well as the creator of life. The current version of the myth of the origin of death begins: 'When Kyala created the country and the people at the beginning there was no death. Then he thought there should be death and life. He asked people to choose between life and death, and they chose life.' And when men are asked the reason for a custom or ritual they may answer 'Kyala made us so', 'Kyala made us black people like that'.

Since Kyala is nowadays regarded as the creator of the natural order he is often blamed for the intractability of things—the log that splits, the lorry that skids. Once a vendor of very small potatoes said, when the buyer complained of the size, 'Kyala gave them to us like this', only to be jeered at by the onlookers who admonished him: 'Had you cultivated better they would have been larger.'

776 775 Much of the material quoted is susceptible of the interpretation that Kyala is an overriding power to which the shades, witches, and medicines are subject. 'The medicine will be effective if Kyala wills'; 'rain will fall when the rain-maker soaks his stones if Kyala wills'; 'when the doctor treats the tails they "vomit" (froth over), then if Kyala has helped us the cattle give much milk'. Even in 1935 conservatives like Kasitile sometimes expressed such beliefs, but they did not do so consistently. Their preoccupation was with other forces and acknowledgment of Kyala seemed to be tacked on almost as an afterthought. This came out very clearly in Kasitile's session with the diviner who, fearing the presence of a European, gave 'Kyala' as the cause of Kasitile's disease, and Kasitile rejected the verdict saying: 'Kyala never stands alone.'

[177] [797] The influence of Christian teaching on pagan thought was already considerable in 1935—Kasitile added 'Jesus' and 'the Holy Spirit' to the shades invoked—and we believe the mention of Kyala in many of the pagan prayers at that date to have been due to Christian influence. The idea of a supreme power is accepted very readily *as an addition* to the belief in the shades, the witches, and medicines, though it does not easily replace them altogether. By 1955 the shift in emphasis was clear. Besides Kyala 'the lord' of a commoner or junior, and Kyala the hero who is worshipped at

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his cave and who, though a creator, is equalled by other heroes and dwells in the bowels of the earth, there was Kyala an ultimate power and first cause, unique and omnipotent, who dwelt in heaven 'above'. The implications of *kumwanya* (above) have changed along with the implications of *Kyala*.

The new balance between the different elements in pagan thought was reflected in everyday speech. In the 1930's men spoke constantly of the shades (*abasyuka*), the witches (*abalosi*), and 'the breath of men' (*imbepo sya bandu*); Kyala did not figure much in the conversation of pagans. But in 1955, from the moment when the bus I arrived in skidded off the road and the passengers began assuring each other that *Kyala alimo* (God is present), because no one had been injured, I heard the name constantly. Such a change is hard to prove, but the impression of a marked shift in emphasis was strong.

The conception of the hero Mbasi has also radically altered. During the years before 1914 a man, with two boys in attendance, posed as Mbasi and went round Selya by night, growling in a gruff voice that he was Mbasi, and seizing cattle and fowls and food. He was eventually taken by night, by some Christians, and died after seven months' imprisonment in Tukuyu. Today the Christians never use 'Mbasi' for God, but sometimes identify him with 'Satan', and the pagans use 'Lwembe' rather than 'Mbasi'.

The range of relationships in space was narrow in the traditional Nyakyusa society, and the range of relationship in time was correspondingly so. Only a limited number of chiefdoms co-operated in sacrifice to a hero (and often they seem to have acted separately, rather than in concert), and all historical time was contained in the genealogies depicted. There was a dawn when men ate food raw and lived without fire, or cattle, or chiefs, but history began when the heroes descended from the mountains, ten or twelve generations ago. Time was telescoped when all the known world lay within 100 miles.

A social revolution occurred once, with the coming of the chiefs, but then time stood still, and ever since the heroic age has remained the pattern of right behaviour. Departure from the rituals laid down spells madness and death, for 'Kyala created us so'. Part of primeval reality is the conflict of generations expressed in the myth of the seduction of a young wife by her husband's father, in the rules of avoidance, and in the ritual of the 'coming out'. There is no convention of fighting on this last occasion (as

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marriage is a sacrament, a mystical union of husband and wife who wash together in the 'blood' of the husband's lineage; and at death kinsmen share a communion with the 'faithful departed'.

We have already touched on the changing conception of *Kyala*. The idea of a supreme power, or creator, distinct from the shades and heroes, is clear enough to Christians and is becoming more and more familiar to pagans, a young priest even insisting that his father and Kasitile could bring rain only 'if God wills' (*vide supra*, p. 119). Christians believe that 'God alone sends rain', and they are profoundly sceptical of the pagan rain-maker.

The Christians also speak of Satan (*Satano*) whom some identify with 'Mbasi' (Lwembe) and to whom the more orthodox attribute evil dreams of snakes and lions and fighting, which the pagans attribute to witchcraft. To the pagan the snake *is* the witch come to attack him; to the Christian it is Satan come to tempt him. The orthodox, following the teaching of missionaries, deny the existence of witchcraft, but most admit to a lively fear of sorcery which is rationalized as 'poisoning', though when the conception is examined it can be shown to include much beside poison put in food or drink. Some of our closest Christian friends admitted their fears. X, the Christian wife of a pagan chief, said one day when we were discussing witchcraft: 'You dissemble like all Europeans, you do not wish to admit belief in witchcraft, you are just pretending.' 'You really think we believe in it?' 'Yes, we all know that Europeans just hide their belief.'

Another chief's wife, Y, also a professing Christian, said: 'We all believe in witchcraft, it really exists.' Then she went on to tell how someone had come to 'choke' her one night recently when she was visiting her own people:

> I woke out of a heavy sleep with a pain in the back of my neck and my head. It was as if someone was stamping on my head. I woke up feeling heavy, I was very heavy. I said: 'If I die, you also will die. Who is outside? Who is choking me? Do they not fear God (Kyala)?' Then someone kicked the door and I shouted, 'Mother, mother!' and I heard footsteps going away.

When asked whether she believed that village headmen protected their people from witchcraft she went on:

> They fight the witches by night, they protect their people, they see the witches and drive them away.
>
> QUESTION: How do you know that witches really exist, do they admit themselves to be witches?

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were connected. And if the expected judgement does not fall when a son has wronged his father it is said: 'The father loves the child so much that he only complains half-heartedly.'

It is admitted (when the point is pressed) that misfortunes *may* fall on good men as well as evil, and then they are interpreted as a discipline, a testing, from God, but this is 'a hard saying', scarcely to be believed. The *inequalities* in the fortunes of men demand explanations and Christians, as well as pagans, find it very difficult to believe that they are 'natural'. They always suspect some human intervention; they believe that men manipulate mystical power to buy fortune for themselves. The reality of pythons in the belly may be doubted by the better educated, but belief in 'medicines' has scarcely diminished, and new medicines are constantly coming in from outside, among them costly patent medicines guaranteed to cure any and every disease, or to make the user popular and successful. Some sort of distinction between medicines which it is permissible for a Christian to use and those, like love-potions and defence against witchcraft, which are not permissible, is attempted, but the line is an arbitrary one. And often there is a conflict in the individual's own mind: as one elderly woman of a chief's family (who would normally have taken the first-fruits medicines) put it: 'It's taboo to use these medicines; even if we do fall ill we say: "No, I will not take it, I look towards God (pointing upwards)."'

Most Christians have pagan kinsfolk who are quick to interpret misfortunes in pagan terms, and the sort of conflict of ideas that arises is illustrated in the case of a young woman who died in childbirth. She and her father were Moravians; her husband had joined the Pentecostal Church which rejects all Nyakyusa medicines. Her first child was still-born, the second died shortly after its birth, and her father insisted that she should have been taking a medicine which it was customary for women in his lineage (he was a Penja) to drink during pregnancy; the girl herself wished to be treated, for she did not accept the teaching of the Pentecostal Church on this point, but her husband refused. During her third pregnancy she was ill and finally, with her husband's consent, she was carried to a Nyakyusa doctor of her father's choosing; nevertheless she died. Her father and her husband had been on bad terms, the father demanding, rather arbitrarily, the balance of the marriage cattle; and there was a great deal of gossip, some neighbours hinting that her own father had killed

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We remarked to a Christian friend, a deacon, that the rains were late. He replied: 'Well, it is not so very unusual. Sometimes rains begin in one part of the country and not in another. Sometimes we do not get heavy rain down here until the end of January.' In short, the more educated Christians are beginning to think in more general terms: they do not as yet define probabilities statistically in terms of rainfall averages, but they are tending in that direction.

And what of the positive content of Christianity? The supreme attraction, mentioned again and again as the reason for conversion, is: 'There is life' (*ubumi bulipo*), and it is life in a world to come rather than 'more abundant life' here and now that is spoken of. The contrast is between heaven above and the shadowy world 'beneath' of pagan thought, or a fearful fiery hell in which most Christians believe and to which, some think, all pagans are condemned. Constantly in sermons by Nyakyusa preachers there was stress on life, resurrection, and on the rewards and punishments of the future life, and this theme recurs again and again in the dreams of Christians.

There is a gulf also between the pagan conception of 'driving off' the shades and the heroes lest by 'brooding over' a man they bring madness and death, and the Christian ideal of union with God. Sermons stress the goodness and love of God, characteristics quite foreign to the traditional picture of Kyala.

Something of the quality of Christian thought and feeling may be grasped by an examination of the names taken at baptism—the convert from paganism always chooses a new name for himself and the meaning is more immediately obvious to everyone than it is with modern English Christian names derived, as they mostly are, from languages no longer familiar. Many of the Nyakyusa names express a very direct personal relationship with God, the Redeemer: 'He has looked upon me', 'He has roused me', 'He has waited hoping for me', 'He has died for me', 'He gives me courage', 'He has changed me', 'He has chosen me out', 'He has comforted me', and a score more of the same type. Some refer to the Gospels: 'Word of Truth', 'The Word has taken hold of me'. A few speak of purification: 'Make me white', 'He has washed me'. Some express that union with God which the pagans so greatly fear: 'We are with him', 'He has come near', 'He has brooded over me', 'Let us approach', and some thanksgiving: 'Let us sing to Him', 'We praise Him', 'We have rejoiced', and some life: 'He is risen',

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was not an individual one. True, a girl gave her formal consent in the marriage ritual, but the pressure on her to accept the husband selected for her by her kinsmen was almost irresistible. In the thirties Christian women who refused their husband's heir and lived alone, or married an unrelated man of their choice, were regarded by their pagan sisters as very daring, and little girls in pagan families took it as a matter of course that they should replace their dead sisters; today the right of a widow to choose whom she will marry is generally accepted, and the custom of replacing a dead woman by her sister has lapsed. 'Every girl wants her own husband nowadays', the old women say. Thus lineage obligations give way to individual freedom of choice in marriage. At the same time the rituals which emphasized the lineage are dropped or modified. The fearful fecundity of a double birth no longer appals men and the twin ritual which used to bring together all the living members of a lineage of three generations is not celebrated at all. At a puberty ritual a pagan girl may be given the *ikipiki* medicine, the symbol of 'the blood of the lineage' by her mother, but there is no seclusion and elaborate feasting, no sacrifice of the bull of puberty that her father's shades may 'move aside a little' to make way for the shades of her husband's lineage. Only at a funeral do kinsmen still gather and celebrate, for many still fear the shades, and at a funeral the heir is installed and the importance of property and the inheritance of it has not diminished one whit. As we have seen, the traditional religion was formulated in terms of kinship; the gods were senior kinsmen; but today God, *Kyala*, is no ancestor; to pagans as well as to Christians he is separate and supreme. Men are still classified by their lineages, and one of the topics of village questions is how Prince Charles can be heir to the British throne when his father is not of the house of Windsor; but already in the economic field, and increasingly in the religious, it is the family of parents and children which is now dominant, not the lineage.

Divorce is far more frequent than formerly, partly because women claim a greater freedom of behaviour than before, as well as the right of choosing their own husbands, and are supported by the courts. As one village headman put it, 'Formerly a father beat his daughter with a stick if she ran home and sent her back to her husband who also beat her.' The women reject the old pattern of subservience which was expressed in crouching to greet a man, and addressing him in a very deferential fashion; the men observe, and

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787 [164 484] sister of the chief had also been brought back to the village of her brother. I was of the opinion that she was afflicted by a serious tropical ulcer on the ankle of the left foot. The healing of these ulcers commonly takes a very long time, and as this woman had already much suffered, and as the medicine-men consulted seemed to be unable to restore her, she was brought to her brother's village, but there also she had not yet recovered. The chief had, therefore, resolved to ask the diviner, whose name was Mwaigwisya, for the real cause of her sickness.

After he and his *amafumu* had taken their seats on mats, the chief explained to the diviner the reason of his visit. The diviner then grasped a curved piece of wood about 20 cms. in length with his right hand, after he had spat upon his hands. Then he moved the wood round his head, and finally placed it with one of its ends on the even, cleansed ground before his mat, and waited for the questions of the chief. The single questions, as for instance: "Is the sickness caused by Kyara?", or "Is the sickness caused by this or that person?", etc., were put to the diviner by Lamek Mwainyekule, the son of a chief of another chieftainship[16], now belonging to the *amafumu* of Mwamasika, as he now stayed in his village. Mwainyekule seemed to be not only

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The Séance with the diviner.

[776] the most intimate adviser of Mwamasika, but alltogether the most clever man I met among this people. After each of the questions addressed to him the diviner murmured the names of the chief's

[16] A village of this name is to be found on Dr. *Kieperts* map (of 1895), southern to the Kieyo.

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ancestors and of Kyara[17]. At the same time he moved his curved wood to and fro on the ground and when he did so, it indicated a negative answer from the beings invoked. But when he was asked: "Is the guilt for the sickness to be found in the husband of the chief's sister?", he was unable to move his wood as before; he could only stamp it on the ground, and this meant an affirmative reaction of the invoked spirits. Now, therefore, the meeting had reached its aim.

I asked the diviner to tell me how he had acquired his faculty. He explained that (besides the necessary inner disposition) the payment of a fee for the medical preparation was necessary in order to become a diviner[18]. This outfit consisted in a special vaccination by a learned diviner. For this purpose the neophyte was incised by his master on different spots on the upper side of the knuckles, and in these small incisions was rubbed a medical powder. By these means the initiate may be inspired by the prophesying spirits. These influences are then felt by the diviner as a power which directs the movements of his hand in the manner described.

6. Near the hut of the chief's principal wife was a "sacred" banana plant, in the grove opposite to the chief's hut and in the grove with the grave of the chief's father already described. At particular times, when any need demands it, the chief offers a prayer in this place to his ancestors[19]. The sickness of his sister, for instance, was such an occasion for him to address the ancestors. I was invited by the chief to witness this act; but I raised objections, telling him that my presence might perhaps rather cause the anger than the help of his ancestors. In reality, I did not want the chief to stage a theatrical act on my behalf. But the chief rejected my excuses and explained that he would act in the same manner as if I were not present, because he had made up his mind to this prayer. The chief was assisted during this ceremony by Mwainyekule who presented to the chief a calabash of water as he arrived at the banana plant devoted to this purpose. The chief took some mouthfuls of the water and squirted it towards the banana plant. Then he recited the names of his ancestors and begged them to help his sister.

7. During one afternoon, I was told that a ceremony to end the initiation of a (betrothed) girl was going on in a family of the village.

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[17] name of the supreme spiritual being.

[18] Cf. *Mackenzie*, p. 228.

[19] *Mackenzie* refers that such a place is named "ikiyinja", "the familiy place oft prayer" (pp. 144, 197), but without indication of the locality, as Karonga.